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Reflections on the ruins of Athens and Rome: Derrida and Simmel on temporality, life and death

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Abstract

The recent publication of the translation of Jacques Derrida's *Athens, Still Remains*, a small volume of photographs and commentary, affords an opportunity to probe Derrida's reflections on death and therefore on life as well. Looking at photographs and objects of everyday life, Derrida emphasizes the deferred yet certain nature of death and the way in which this deferral opens the opportunity to devote ourselves to life. His grounding of his philosophical and deconstructionist argument in contemplation of material fragments (the photographs of ruins and scenes from the recent past of Athens) invites a comparison with the writing of sociologist Georg Simmel on ruins, time and death. Both writers attempt to discover practices of survival, the *techne* of affirming life in the face of death. For both of them these practices are sociological as well as philosophical, individual as well as collective, and aesthetic as well as intellectual. While their reflections thematically converge, their strategies for the affirmation of life are not identical, and we contrast Derrida's approach, rooted in a concept of being in the world and a connection to others, to Simmel's analysis which is focused on the role of culture and the force of the human spirit. Reconstructing a conversation between Derrida and Simmel and examining their intellectual rapprochement deepen our thinking about temporality and death as we confront the question 'How are we to live?'

Keywords

death, Jacques Derrida, life, Georg Simmel, temporality

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Introduction: Time, death, deferral

The recent publication of a translation of Jacques Derrida's *Athens, Still Remains* (2010), a small volume of photographs and commentary, affords an opportunity to probe Derrida's reflections on death (and therefore on life as well). We cannot simply read this essay as a minor piece about photography which supplements Derrida's central philosophical works, but must understand it as a key text because, as philosopher Michael Naas argues:

> ... one must reckon with the fact that the themes ... – light, appearance, representation, truth, time, death, mourning, singularity and repetition, the event – are some of the central themes of the history of philosophy itself and thus of Derrida's reading, or deconstruction, of it. (Naas, 2011: 206)

Our approach to Derrida comes from sociology and our emphasis here is to draw out how Derrida confronts objects of everyday life, in this case photographs of Athens's ruins, as vehicles for articulating his ideas about human experience, specifically one's relation to death.[1] This emphasis on the everyday affords us the opportunity to put Derrida's insights into conversation with sociology, and in particular the sociological thought of Georg Simmel, as two perspectives on life in relation to death and temporality.

Comparing and contrasting Derrida's and Simmel's reflections on death and time enables us to think and speak more clearly about death; it also provides an opportunity to appreciate two markedly different approaches, drawing on two distinct disciplines and theoretical perspectives that are not diametrically opposed to each other but fall at different points of a continuum of thought. Thus our comparison opens a dialog that contains both marked divergence and yet also intellectual rapprochement on the central question of how a reflection on death and time can enable us to live more fully. Both theorists draw on ruins to consider how the material fragments of the past (photographs in the case of Derrida, and ruins in that of Simmel) provide an opportunity to reflect on time, death and life. Furthermore, both present an ambiguous, even contradictory set of conclusions, in which the contemplation of death leads to a reaffirmation of life and to reflection on practices of survival which are simultaneously philosophical and sociological. While they thematically converge, the strategies for survival and the affirmation of life are based on different *techne*, different practices; thus we contrast Derrida's approach, rooted in a concept of being in the world and a connection to others, to Simmel's analysis that introduces the role of culture and the force of the human mind. As a result, we can see how both thinkers offer ways of invoking the question of 'What do we make of dying?' and in doing so simultaneously provoke reciprocal ways of asking the opposite question of 'What do we make of living?'

Derrida starts with the subject of death, and thereby opens the subject of how one is to live that interval between birth and death, an uncertain but inevitably finite stretch of time. Here Derrida's answer to this question is to offer a 'crypto-existentialist' discourse that the time that we have left on earth, the unknowable but certainly finite stretch of time between the 'now' and our death, forces us to define ourselves. In this sense we 'owe ourselves to death' [*nous nous devons à la mort* – a repeated sentence throughout

the book]. It is the combination of the certainty and deferral of our own death that forces us to create ourselves in life.

The subject of death pulls us in two directions, one looking backwards towards deaths that others have experienced, deaths we can 'see' from the outside and that call for mourning in the usual sense of the term. We wear mourning for others and only mourn the past. However, the subject of death also pulls us forward, out of the now into the future, towards our own death, and it is this direction in which Derrida chooses to move, undermining the superficial impression that this book is about photography and the past – a deception that a close reading dispels.

Derrida's incessantly repeated reference to death and mourning hides a life-affirmation which appears to be in direct contrast to Simmel's view expressed in his essay 'The Ruin'. Simmel's essay is about the already of death. It has already happened. The ruins are traces not only of the civilization of the past but also of its passing, of its moment of death. The past is over and nature is reclaiming the ruins; their presence is a memento mori of the passing of human civilization and of 'the works of man', a version of Shelley's 'Ozymandias'. For Simmel, ruins express culture's disintegration and humanity's loss of control over itself when the creations by which it objectified itself pass into decay and oblivion. We mourn the past and, with it, the ephemeral condition of our own life, but indirectly so, with detachment and possibly even pleasure. For Simmel objective culture is man's creations and the markers of human existence that are destined to decay and fade. Simmel's remembrance draws us to the inevitability of death, to the inevitable 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust' finitude of all human existence. In Simmel's 'The Ruin', the inevitability of death is recalled by the sight of the ruin and yields a melancholy sorrow. In seeing this decay and fading of objective culture, we reminisce and become resigned, detached and nostalgic.

Simmel's essay 'The Ruin' is not his only reflection on ruins, the past and the passing of time. In his essay 'Rome', Simmel offers a strikingly different view. The decay of the ruins and the fading of the past that this decay signals are reversed by the work of the mind, by our ability as thinking human beings to transfigure the ruins into a new and coherent whole, a reaffirmation of culture and a recontextualization of these dusty and broken objects into a larger vision of life full of vitality. Because we are active in creating/perceiving/constructing this unity, continuity and context, the memories that we produce through this act of reimagining are much stronger and more intense than ordinary memories. The unity and integration of Rome are not primarily in the objects but are our own creations – we 'make the relationships' and construct the unity (overcoming the simplistic subject/object distinction) into a complete and coherent whole. While death and finitude are overcome by the work of the mind, it is the persevering strength of the human spirit that creates new forms out of that very material that has decayed and turned to dust. This is the central idea of 'Rome' in sharp contrast to the apparent finality, nostalgia and melancholy of 'The Ruin'. Simmel, like Derrida, sees that finitude and death produce creativity and life, but their trajectories to these conclusions are different although both begin their path with a view of ruins.

In part I, we focus primarily on Derrida and draw out the significance of photography in *Athens, Still Remains*, and more generally on Derrida's thought on the issues of time, death and deferral, including his views of obsolescence, mourning and the phrase 'we

owe ourselves to death'. Throughout this part of the article, we juxtapose Derrida's positions to those of Simmel as Simmel developed his ideas in two contrasting essays, 'The Ruin' and 'Rome'. We begin with a summary of Derrida's reflections on time and death, thoughts that are spurred by his viewing photographs of Athens. We examine his ideas about the deferral and certainty/uncertainty of death which affirms life. We then turn to the work of Simmel to see how his dynamic and dialectical view of Rome as constantly reconstructed into an ever-more beautiful totality contrasts with his nostalgic musing in 'The Ruin'.

In part II, we continue the contrast by examining each writer's understanding of survival and the *techne* or practices that make survival possible. These practices are philosophical and sociological, individual and collective, in that they provide different vantage points for grappling with the same issues, one being a more detached theoretical reflection and the other a more empirical concern with social connectedness.

We conclude by returning to our initial starting point and consider how Derrida's thoughts about everyday life offer us an approach to rethinking/reworking/re-evaluating our practice of living without recourse to an essential human spirit which must either transcend or mourn the contemporary condition of human life. He unmasks the temporal aspects of everyday life as defining the very meaning of how social beings live with other social beings. Derrida's philosophical reflections can be supplemented and used as a springboard into the sociological concerns, recognizing that 'How are we to live?' is not an abstract question pertaining only to the realm of philosophy but rather it simultaneously addresses the sociological sense of living in the world. In contrast, Simmel uses the concept of the human spirit (or mind) as a key to imagining a constant transformation of a decaying material world into a transfigured and enduring cultural form which serves as a life-affirming mode of transcending the current conditions of existence.[2]

I: Remains and death: Photographs and ruins

Death deferred: The meaning of Demeure, Athènes

Derrida's essay is about the *not yet* of death. It will happen but it has not yet happened, and this combination of *not yet but inevitably so* gives our lives both structure and openness. We know it will happen and its inevitability permeates every minute of the now (and is therefore visible in every photograph), but at the same time its *not-yetness*, its deferral or delay, leaves our life open to ourselves, to our capacity for self-definition in the condition of being certain to die, but 'not dead yet'. '*On ne sait jamais* . . . ' [One never knows] says Derrida about the moment of Socrates' death as he awaits his deferred execution, and by extension one never knows the time of all of our deaths (Derrida, 2010: 35). The topic of the book is the life-affirming consequence of this delay and uncertainty.

The title of the book in French, *Demeure, Athènes*, can be translated in a number of ways and contains multiple levels of meaning. The translators, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, have selected *Athens, Still Remains* perhaps in order to highlight the 'abiding' quality of *demeure* and to introduce a punning reference to stills, i.e. the photographs which are the ostensible topic of the book. But other meanings are called up by the title: Athens, my dwelling place, my legal residence – i.e. a place of abiding and

fixity (the noun *demeure*); the term *dernière demeure* (last resting place); and the verb *demeurer* which means to remain faithful in a relationship. But above all, *demeure* can be taken as an imperative that means 'put it off, postpone it, defer it, delay it'. *Demeurer* is a word that practically falls into the category of 'contraries' that so intrigued Freud, words that contain opposite meanings, such as 'to cleave' ('cutting apart' and 'sticking together'). It refers both to an abiding or fixed quality (especially in terms of space) and (in referring to time) the process of deferring and delaying, of placing the time of an event into doubt, 'putting it off' into an uncertain future. It is akin to 'stay' with its dual meaning of 'abide, remain' and 'put off, delay, postpone'.

Taking 'deferral' as the key meaning is supported by Derrida's lengthy and central discussion of the last days of Socrates. The execution of Socrates had to be stayed because executions could not be carried out in Athens before the return of the ship that carried an annual pilgrimage to Delos. This delay arose through a combination of humanly constructed rules (no executions during the pilgrimage) and the chance workings of nature. It was during this 'deferral' or 'delay' of the sentence that Socrates decided not to attempt to escape and instead devoted himself to philosophy, as a musical instrument is devoted to music. Reading the title as referring to deferral adds a layer of purpose to Derrida's work and draws attention to his focus on how one uses the uncertain span one has left on earth to give meaning to one's life, as Socrates committed himself to do during the days allotted to him by his stay of execution.

Photography as document

Derrida's essay is ostensibly about photography and is organized around a number of photographs of Athens, such as musical instruments in an antique shop, a photographer dozing on the Acropolis, meat and vegetables in the market, tombs in the Kerameikos Cemetery and so on, but the real topic is death (death more so than mourning, although it is often interpreted as being about mourning). Each photograph recalls death in some form, whether it is a tomb, a street named after Persephone, used instruments or appliances, and so on; they are all moments of a 'now' that is inevitably a moment in the sequence (or series) of moments that lead to death.

The role of photography in *Athens, Still Remains* is to force us to contend with the finite temporality and survival within which our existence unfolds. Photography is the medium that opens the topic of time and death. In looking at the photographs, we understand that Derrida is not simply mourning a lost past, but rather recognizes both loss and future survival and thereby encourages us to confront finitude and temporality without becoming nostalgic. This position is linked to Derrida's remarks in *Learning How to Live Finally* (2007) that grappling with existence is not a passive or detached contemplation but an act of deconstruction.

Deferral and anticipation

In the case of *Athens, Still Remains*, Derrida takes the objects of a series of photographs, the ruins of Athens, and thinks through them as an approach to our social condition. Derrida is strikingly different from Simmel in theorizing the consequences of ruins in terms

of how they inform the present and the future. For Derrida, the ruins of Athens will lead us to consider the significance of our inheritance of the objects of everyday life. The ruins will provoke a series of questions on how we can carry on the legacy of those who came before us, not by ossifying those objects, but by recognizing their presence as a living inheritance.

The contrast between Derrida (who uses the images of ruins to force us to confront our own finitude) and Simmel in 'The Ruin' (who contemplates ruins but thereby creates a more muted and distanced relationship to death as an eternal challenge to the human spirit) is dramatic. And herein lies a further paradox: Derrida's direct confrontation with a death that is our own and imminent (certainly an unsettling choice of topic) is more life-affirming than Simmel's elegiac contemplation of the death of others in the past that is metaphorically expressed in the contemplation of ruins that return to nature. Simmel and Derrida have both given us a memento mori but their texts have opposite valences and appear to move in diametrically opposed directions. Simmel's essay is a mournful reflection on the 'already' of death, the decay and ruin that remind us that nature ultimately wins over human endeavor. Derrida's little book about photography is a peculiarly life-affirming, crypto-existentialist assertion about the 'not yet' of death, about its deferral, delay, or postponement as well as its inevitability. Our life is fashioned from the twin facts that we must die but that death has not yet happened: 'we owe ourselves to death' says Derrida, that is, we construct our life in the knowledge of its finitude.

Yet in a different essay, Simmel provides a striking contrast to the nostalgic and elegiac tone of 'The Ruin'. In a work written 13 years earlier, he turns to the human ability to re-envision Rome, to construct in the present (in the mind's eye) a comprehensive whole from the decayed fragments that we now see in Rome, the fallen blocks of marble, haphazardly scattered columns, collapsed walls of temples, and decaying churches and palaces. The human mind's powers of imagination, vision, composition and contextualization enable us to recreate Rome as even more beautiful and unified than it was historically. Simmel implies that through this visualization human beings overcome objective processes of material decay and become able to see what was and no longer is – and even to construct a unity that is more beautiful than any past reality.

Photography and human finitude: Photography as art and archive

Derrida conceptualizes photography as both art and archive. In the case of photography, the photographed object(s) gains meaning in the present by our tracing the trace of its meanings into the past. In the case of *Athens, Still Remains*, Derrida insists that photography is a non-liner concatenation and that meaning/memories can never be derived from the binary opposite of 'naturalism' or 'phenomenology'. For Derrida, since there is never an (either/or), we must constantly think (both/and) as categories of interpretation. The ruins of Athens are at once natural and man-made. They are the work of human hands and the hands of time. Their significance, culturally, historically, symbolically cannot be explained by the naturalness of nature's decay over the human construction, or by the nostalgia of a once great human accomplishment (and one should note that the photographs by J. F. Bonhomme are not presented as works of beauty like Piranesi

drawings of ruins, but displayed in a crude and simple manner, 'snapshot-like'). Photography opens up a space for art/archive to reveal to us meanings of past, present and future in their differing historicities. Photography as both art and archive calls forth a response that forces us to confront our existence and the finite temporality within which that existence unfolds. Ultimately what Derrida points us to is not a detached contemplation of photography, but an active assessment of our own self-understanding – that forces us to take into account the finitude of our own existence – not merely loss or mourning for 'others' or for culture in general as Simmel appears to suggest.

Photographs as references to death

Derrida begins *Athens, Still Remains* with the cryptic remark 'We owe ourselves to death'. Through photography, as both art and archive, Derrida takes us on a journey in which we must come to terms with this statement. We owe ourselves to death, or rather we owe ourselves to the finitude of our existence. Life may feel infinite and eternal in the moment, but Derrida reminds us that in the moment of that thought, that moment has already passed, never to be recaptured. Both art and archive establish difference, distance and a break with our current conceptual and temporal world; both art and archive serve as metaphors for the temporality of life. We owe ourselves to death – thus we owe ourselves to time – we owe ourselves the time to think how we owe ourselves to death. Thinking photography as art/archive forces us to think of our own finitude.

Derrida argues that photography in attempting to represent that which it tries to document always holds more meaning than just that which is represented. Photography reveals what the eye can often overlook. He writes:

> Back and forth from one to the other, from one column to another and one limit or turning point to the next, this seriality *is in mourning* or *bears mourning* [*porte le deuil*]. It bears mourning through its discrete structure (interpretation, separation, repetition, survival); it bears the mourning *of itself all by itself*, beyond the things of death that form its theme, if you will, or the content of the images. It's not just in the Kerameikos Cemetery or among its funerary steles that this can be seen. Whether we are looking at the whole picture or just a detail, never do any of these photographs fail to signify death. Each signifies death without saying it. Each one, in any case, recalls a death that has already occurred, or one that is promised or threatening, a sepulchral monumentality, memory in the figure of ruin. (Derrida, 2010: 2)

For Derrida, all notions of representation are problematic; there is no direct representation or transparent depiction of reality. Beyond the content of the images themselves, there is the temporality of meaning and the meaning of temporality. By examining the events, people, places and things of the photograph, Derrida muses on their implicit relation to death. Seeing the photographs, Derrida contemplates the relation between death and mourning. The photographs document a time past and provide an account of deaths, an archive of deaths, one pointing to another in seriality and repetition, which in turn points to future deaths. Here Derrida alerts us to his thinking of mourning as an accounting for periods past and the passing of periods to come. In thinking of this relation to

death, Derrida is asking us to consider not the act of dying, but the temporality of no longer living. In death there is no time; without time there is no life. Just as we must consider our relation to death, we must also simultaneously consider our relation to life. It is these differences, death/life, stasis/time, to which we must attend in Derrida's work.

The collection of photographs about which Derrida writes is an archive of deaths, and, as such, it offers an ideal tool for thinking of images and memories, of meanings, of times, and of people past. Photographs serve as fragments of a past that can never be fully reconstructed (and one that was never fully present); we cannot fully understand the past yet we are expected to account for it. He draws special attention to the photographs of the recent past in Athens, of 'modern Athens' which has passed away just as much as the Athens of classical antiquity:

> This world that was the Athens of yesterday – already a certain modernity of the city – everyday Athens photographed in its everydayness, is the Athens that is now no longer in Athens. Her soul would risk being even less present, it might be said, than the archeological vestiges of Ancient Athens. Their ruin, the only telling archive for this Market, this Café, this Street Organ, the best memory of this culture, would be photographs . . . Tomorrow, living Athens will be seen keeping and keeping an eye on, guarding and regarding, reflecting and reflecting on its deaths. (Derrida, 2010: 6)

The constitution of the archive is the stockpiling of Athens's past(s) in these photographs. Photographs in their freezing of temporality into a moment, into a frozen moment of time, can be catalogued and arranged so that history, memory and meaning can be preserved. This recounting of history (death as what is no longer present) as art/archive allows recollection and remembrance to remain possibilities into the future.

Derrida's double of art/archive provides a way into thinking historicity and aesthetics without reducing one to the other; the archival metaphor allows for concurrent temporalities to be brought together, for different periods to be juxtaposed to see differences in time, history and meaning. The art metaphor allows us to see them in their singularity and in their own context and composition with criteria of evaluation that may not be our own.

Photographs, time and mourning

Implicit in both art and archive is the notion that each photograph is a trace of the past which points to yet another trace and links the meaning of that trace to a further cascade of connected meanings. Derrida emphasizes this dual sense of photography where he describes himself:

> Walking along the edge, as I said just a moment ago, of the abyss of images, I am retracing the footsteps of the photographer. He bears in advance the mourning for Athens, for a city owed to death, a city due for death, and two or three times rather than one, according to different temporalities: mourning for the ancient, archeological, or mythological Athens, to be sure, mourning for an Athens that is gone and that shows the body of its ruins; but also a mourning for an Athens that he knows, as he is photographing it, in the present of his snapshots, will be gone or will disappear tomorrow, an Athens that is already condemned to pass

> away and whose witnesses . . . disappeared since the 'shot' was taken; and finally a third anticipated mourning, he knows that other photographs have captured sights that, though still visible today . . . *will have* [*devront*] to be destroyed tomorrow. (Derrida, 2010: 27)
>
> For the same photographer exercises an unprecedented art of composition in the service of his mourning. In the service not of a personal nostalgia but of a melancholy that marks a certain essence of historical experience or, if you prefer, the meaning or sense for history. (Derrida, 2010: 39)

Walking in the path of the photographer and tracing the photographer's footprints enables Derrida to consider the relation between the photographer as artist and as archivist. By tracing the different modalities of meaning that the photographer confronts, Derrida considers the differences in the ways that Athens can be mourned (documented, remembered, accounted for and regarded). For Derrida, there is no a priori standpoint of understanding; the practice of deconstruction leads to further interpretations, of which none can be definitive. However, interpretation is not arbitrary or infinite since interpretation must always depend on the interpreter, the time and context within which the interpreter/photographer is situated, and in the modalities of consideration that open up possible interpretations. What drives Derrida to reflect so intensely on photography in relation to temporality is the relation between time and meaning. What photography as art/archive collects are the meanings of a past in their singularity and temporal instance. For Derrida meaning is temporal; meaning changes and yet meaning must be preserved for the sake of maintaining meaning at all (even though a particular meaning may change in its preservation).

While the present slips away as time passes, the archive holds a record of that moment. Just as time passes, the archive endures. However, the record of the moment can never be taken for the moment itself. Only the meaning of that moment can be held onto in its uniqueness, and the archive preserves those selected meanings which provide enduring social, cultural and historical value. Whereas the ruin dissolves back into a state of nature in a condition vastly altered from the original intentionality of the builders, the archive allows such traces to be preserved; where the ruin fades away, the archive endures.

Ruins and nostalgia

In his essay 'The Ruin', Simmel remarks:

> This shift becomes a cosmic tragedy which, so we feel, makes every ruin an object infused with our nostalgia; for now the decay appears as nature's revenge for the spirit's having violated it by making a form in its own image. The whole history of mankind is a gradual rise of the spirit to mastery over the nature which it finds outside, but in a certain sense also within, itself. (Simmel, 1958: 379)

Here we can see the basic underpinnings of Simmel's thought. For Simmel, spirit is the essence of humanity (and his use of 'spirit' is always to be taken as 'the human spirit' not as a reference to an immortal soul or Holy Spirit). For Simmel (Human) Spirit is an active creating force; forms become extensions of spirit.[3] Forms become spirit's identity

embodied, as the creation of forms become instantiations of spirit's own self-image. For Simmel, 'nature's revenge' is the folding-back of the external world onto spirit, of nature pushing back against spirit's control. This ushers in a feeling of nostalgia for Simmel because the ruin represents a time and place where the human spirit once reigned and now reigns no longer.

Simmel's interpretation is guided by an oppositional dualism (of nature and culture/human spirit) which on the surface appears antagonistic, but ultimately becomes a dialectic, working itself out as it comes to grips with the exteriorization of its own identity. Simmel writes:

> The moment its decay destroys the unity of form, nature and spirit separate again and reveal their world-pervading original enmity – as if the artistic formation had only been an act of violence committed by the spirit to which the stone unwillingly submitted; as if it now gradually shook off this yoke and returned once more into the independent lawfulness of its own forces. (Simmel, 1958: 380)

Decay for Simmel destroys the unity of spirit's form and reveals spirit and nature in their 'world-pervading original enmity'. Encountering the ruin for Simmel brings nostalgia, a sense of enduring loss for previous forms built by 'man' (Spirit) which have decayed over time. In particular, it is the destruction of culture by man himself in both his action and his inaction (Simmel defines the process by which man lets ruins decay as 'positive passivity') that denies a particular ruin any sense of significance. For Simmel, the ruin evokes a sense of loss, a loss of man's (spirit's) own significance.

For Simmel, 'The Ruin' is a meditation on the enduring sense of loss, of something lost of ourselves in the passage of time that can never be retrieved. This sense of loss is fueled by the conquering of man by nature, an acknowledgement of his own temporal obsolescence when he can no longer control the objects of his own creation. As Simmel states:

> The aesthetic value of the ruin combines the disharmony, the eternal becoming of the soul struggling against itself, with the formal satisfaction, the firm limitedness of the work of art. For this reason, the metaphysical-aesthetic charm of the ruin disappears when not enough remains of it to let us feel the upward-leading tendency. (Simmel, 1958: 384)

For Simmel, ruins have meaning and value only insofar as they remain a representation of spirit that spirit itself can recognize. As ruins decay back into a state of nature, as their cultural molding becomes undone, they no longer evoke a response as they cease to symbolize spirit's realization and 'the upward-leading tendency' of spirit's own transcendence.[4] This reflection leads to a resignation from the world accompanied by the sense that it has nothing to offer to our present or our future.[5] So long as the ruin remains, Simmel intimates that ruins may create pleasurable feelings, to the extent that one contemporary interpreter of ruins refers to 'the pleasurable nostalgia that Simmel attributed to all ruins' (Von Moltke, 2010: 411). In this way, the fact that 'death' has already taken place, combined with the picturesque beauty of the ruins, creates the calm contemplation of loss – rather than absolute apathy.[6]

Photography and ruins: Obsolescence, nostalgia and transfiguration as ways of encountering the past

How are we to encounter the past? The photograph documents the differences between time past and time present and it freezes that past so that it can be considered in the present and into the future. Derrida contrasts nostalgia and obsolescence as two modes of considering the material objects of the past, and he argues that the photographs of old technical objects signal obsolescence, even more than nostalgia:

> An original affect, an affect without pathos, surrounds the aura of these photographs: the sense of obsolescence [*l'affect de la disaffection*], precisely, the affect of the one affected by this disuse or obsolescence of technical objects, defunct signs of culture. Is not this affection of the photographer for these implements or signs fallen into disuse also an affect of the delay, of the delay without return? Without return, and that is why I hesitate to use the Greek word that you no doubt have on the tip of your tongue, the Greek word that speaks of the longing for return, of homesickness-nostalgia. If there is nostalgia in these photographs, nothing makes it obvious. But that is not all. Among these fetishes . . . history, history as the historicity of technology, is seen to be discreetly but surely exposed, recounted, analyzed, 'objectified' by the objective or the lens – precisely as the history of ruin or disuse, the history of obsolescence. (Derrida, 2010: 41)

The photographs of technological objects call forth obsolescence as a way of thinking about the relationship between meaning and temporality. The meaning that history retains is meaningful to us only insofar as it remains relevant. Nostalgia distorts meaning as a way of returning to the origin of things, whereas, in contrast, obsolescence signals that the meanings of the past no longer matter to us in the present. This reflection on the obsolescence of technology is implicitly a reflection on the creators of those technologies and their possibility of obsolescence.[7] Nostalgia implies a permanence to the past, whereas obsolescence offers us a way to understand that there was a past, but one that no longer matters in the same way it did in its own time. In this way Derrida juxtaposes the enduring atemporal notion of meaning in nostalgia with the temporalized notion of meaning in obsolescence. Derrida again points the photographic lens back on us to force our awareness of our own existence – both to the fleeting nature of our own existence and in the meaning of our existence (relevance/obsolescence) in our confrontation with the photograph (past and future).

Derrida's discussion of obsolescence affords a sharp contrast with Simmel who sees the ruins not as obsolete but as transformed into material that continues to be relevant to us in the present; in 'The Ruin' they become objects of nostalgia, whereas in 'Rome' they are transfigured into new cultural forms. The ruins are something that changes and is transformed into objects of nostalgia or transfigured into a new unity in the mind's eye, whereas the photograph is more frozen (and this matches Barthes's view of photographs). The ruins are 'open-ended' – they change as the object falls into ruin but they are also something that is reconstituted in the work of the mind, into something even more beautiful and whole than the originals. Simmel writes:

> In the cityscape of Rome such a fortunate and fortuitous merging of human purposeful structures with a new unintentional beauty seems to achieve its highest appeal . . . And since

> the whole has nevertheless assumed such an incomprehensible unity, as if some conscious will had brought its elements together for the sake of beauty, the force of its appeal now seems to emerge from this wide and yet reconciled distance between the arbitrariness of the parts and the aesthetic sense of the whole. Herein lies the happy guarantee that all the senselessness and disharmony of the world's elements do not hinder their unification in the form of a beautiful whole. (Simmel, 2007: 31–2)

So obsolescence (embodied in the photograph) vs transfiguration (embodied by the ruins of Rome) are the contrasting themes of Derrida and Simmel as each contemplates these material fragments of the past. The ruins are not just the objects of nostalgia (as a sentimental feeling, often associated with a false, fetishized, or inauthentic recollection of the past). On the contrary, they are material remains that are not obsolescent but there to be 'worked on' by the human spirit/mind in such a way that the obsolescence of the photograph cannot be reclaimed.

II: Practices of survival

'We owe ourselves to death'

In the second part of the article, we turn to the practices and actions that human beings take to survive, to live and to overcome or refuse death in the time that remains to us. Derrida claims to have no advice on the subject of practices for living, and yet his writing contains hints and fragments. Certainly his comment on the phrase 'we owe ourselves to death' and his effort to decipher the words constitute one of these clues. Derrida points first to the traditional Socratic interpretation of death and its multiple modes of philosophizing as a way to die (death as a desired state of being, death as taking one out of this world into a better world). However, while Derrida claims this interpretation holds sway over all world-views, there is another reading of this statement (through deconstruction) that Derrida holds in reserve. In two key passages, Derrida writes:

> But as for me, I persist in believing that philosophy might have another chance. This ethico-Socratic virtue of 'we owe ourselves to death' can easily be translated into every language and no doubt every 'world view'. But that is not the only meaning that is held in reserve in my sentence, and I protest silently against it. (Derrida, 2010: 59)

> But a delay, these days, is something I always love as what gives me the most to think, more than the present moment, more than the future and more than eternity, a delay *before* time itself. To think the *at present* of the now (present, past, or to come), to rethink instantaneity on the basis of the delay and not the other way around. But delay is not exactly the right word here, for a delay does not exist, strictly speaking. (Derrida, 2010: 17)

Derrida's claim that he holds another meaning of this sentence, albeit one which he keeps silent, is one of protest; in this case Derrida's protest comes in the form of a silence. However, this is a silence, not because this alternative cannot be articulated; on the contrary, this silence is articulated in a mode of comportment – a mode of being or living-in-the-world of one's own temporality and historicity. For Derrida this mode of living is also a mode of thinking. To think is to reflect on one's own temporality, in the moment, about

the moment, to the future in the present, to the past in the present. To think reflexively of temporality in relation to temporality is a delay, a momentary respite from the future overtaking one in the present. In doing so, Derrida forces us to break the familiar notion of our traditional philosophical problems which give us continuity with the past, and instead think temporality in its discontinuity. For Derrida 'the delay' is but a metaphor, a place-holder for the notion of thinking discontinuously, thinking juxtaposition, thinking concatenation. Thus the metaphor of delay challenges us to think about how we remember, how we forget, and how we think of our existence into the unfolding temporality of life.

This moment of reflection, however brief, offers Derrida a moment of refusal. This refusal is a refusal of death; that is not to say that we can deny death, but to deny the primacy of the 'we' who owe ourselves to death and to offer an alternative to 'our obligation'. Derrida writes:

> *Nous nous devons à la mort*, we owe ourselves to death, there is indeed a *nous*, the second one, who owes itself in this way, but we, in the first place, no, the first *we* who looks, observes, and photographs the other, and who speaks here, is an innocent living being who forever knows nothing of death: in this *we* are infinite – that is what I might have wanted to say to my friends. We are infinite, and so let's be infinite, eternally. (Derrida, 2010: 63)

Derrida's cryptic comment with multiple uses of the first-person plural in a reflexive construction – 'we owe ourselves to death' – becomes clear once we understand the role that photography as art/archive plays in its full import of Derrida's thinking. When he writes of the 'us'/'ourselves' (*nous* in second position in the sentence, as the object of the reflexive verb) who owe ourselves to death, he is stating matter-of-factly that our lives are temporal and that we will eventually die. However this first-person plural object (*nous* meaning 'us'/'ourselves') differs from his use of 'we' with which he is indicating not universal or transcendental Being (past, present, future) destined to death, but the 'we' of the present, the 'we' of the reader, the 'we' of the living (the *nous* or 'we' that is the subject of the sentence). Derrida's mourning throughout the text, is not a mourning that cripples or denies life, rather it is a mourning of affirmation. For him, the 'we' of the present, who forever know nothing of death, are those who do not orient their future towards death (where death is our *telos* constantly defining our comportment). Those who do not define themselves through death are no longer 'owed' to death, in that their living is not defined or predetermined for them by living for death. Rather, thinking in the moment, living in the moment in our own existence, embracing our own historicity, as we reflect on the relationship between ourselves and our fleeting temporality, is not to deny death, but to affirm life. It is this 'we' of which Derrida speaks when he claims we can be infinite and eternal. Derrida, like the photographer, is calling forth a response from us. To be 'infinite eternally' is to live the finite in the now of our own situated presentness in its fullest capacity and not for tomorrow of which there is no photograph.[8]

The imagined past and the trace: Memory as a practice of survival

Simmel also proposes a *techne*, a set of practices, which reverses the apparent melancholy of nostalgia and its accompanying sense of the irreversibility of decay. He does

so in his essay 'Rome' which is about the action and power of the human mind to accomplish a *miracle* (2007: 31) and the transformation of disparate human-made remains of the past, scattered in a landscape, into a whole of incomparable beauty, an 'organic unity'. This unity exists through a multiplicity of modes: in the liveliness of the juxtapositions, in the integration of nature (the hills, vegetation and other features of the terrain) with the human-made elements, in the manner in which separate time-periods converge into a 'presentness and togetherness' (ibid.: 33). Existing structures are recontextualized so that the whole coheres though it is made up of parts from different periods, in different styles, and from nature as well as the human hand. Simmel emphasizes that it is we who create this unity through the elements of Rome. There is nothing that inherently unites these elements, rather 'only in the perceiving mind, since it occurs only in a particular culture under certain circumstances of mood and education . . . the self-activity demanded of it is Rome's most precious gift' (ibid.: 35). As Kemple observes, for Simmel:

> Understanding death as a form-giving process rather than only as a punctuated moment of finality means that the overall unity of the life-process is not achieved solely as a predetermined fact but also through the unfolding of an autonomous I (*das Ich*), actualized as an intelligent and purposive will through its experience of life's contents. Just as the relativity of empirical phenomena which are critically judged to be good and bad, beautiful or ugly appears under the light of the ultimate ideals they are measured against, so Life in the absolute metaphysical sense embraces its opposite, its *alter*, as an existential moment of its development through an ongoing process. (Kemple, 2007: 10)

Thus the overcoming of death and the decay that comes with the passing of time is a culturally grounded act of the imagination, as Simmel says – a self-activity in which the object/subject distinction is overcome. We create Rome (or any other enchanted site) by our own actions, out of the pieces that time and circumstance bequeathed us.

Derrida reaches a similar conclusion in his discussion of the trace. If we think of art/archive as the collection of our experiences and relations, of what constitutes us, we want to preserve them all. While this is an impossibility, it is one that we strive to attain in our aesthetic comportment (*techne*) of remembrance and reverence (mourning). Meanings are associated with traces and lie in the *differing* and *deferring* of one meaning to previous meanings, since the trace is not a substitute, but rather a link or indicator to what came before. Here we see the links between the *deferral of death* (we all live in that uncertain period that precedes our death, comparable with the last days of Socrates) and *deferring* as a deconstructive practice, the recognition of the incomplete, open-ended and provisional way in which meaning moves around (and is never 'established' – a word that would convey a solidity and fixity that deconstruction seeks to undermine).[9]

In order to understand the meaning of the trace, we can discern its meaning only in the present, in our immediate situated socio-historical context. In doing so, we must treat time as non-linear for two reasons: first, because our sense of time is always already constructed; and second, because the trace necessarily implies a past, a no longer present, (though this no longer present was never fully present even in some past to which it refers/defers and therefore complicates our relationship to temporality (past, present and future). Through temporal juxtapositions and concatenations, we realize we must

reconstruct the past in the present, or the 'past–present/present–past' so that we can begin to understand how meaning operates in relation to the present and in its simultaneous difference from the past. This in turn reorients our understanding of temporality and our relationship to it. Derrida argues that 'the presenting general is not primal but, rather, reconstituted, that it is not the absolute, wholly living form which constitutes experience, that there is no purity of the living present' (Derrida, 1978: 266). Since there is no pure or absolute present, we can think the *meaningful* difference of time, memory/meaning, and the history of the trace/a trace in question only by challenging linear time and instead thinking concatenations of time(s), past and present simultaneously.

The *techne* of learning to live, the relation that mediates between life and death, is the reflecting on, but more importantly a *living* in, one's present. That practice is always a temporal one, in which time is always unfolding and escaping our grasp to hold it still, like the arresting of time in the photograph. But the practice of photography brings us back to thinking art and archive; to live for Derrida is to practise life like art, to enjoy the intensity of experience, and in our ethos of life, to store these moments and hold them in our memory, as in an archive. Photography as art/archive draws out the aesthetic component of our existence, in terms of both *what* is stored and *how* our meanings, memories, understandings are stored, depicted, represented and organized.

In making these connections among art, archive and trace, Derrida overcomes the distinction between 'my work' and 'me', between work and life. His work and ideas as a philosopher are not separable from his life as human being, from his actions, comportment and sociality with others. In another passage in *Learning to Live Finally*, Derrida argues that:

> All the ideas that have helped me in my work, and notably that of the trace or of the spectral, were related to this 'surviving' as a structural and rigorously originary dimension. It is not derived from either living or dying. (Derrida, 2007: 29)

Derrida's ideas, as he himself declares, are always ideas that serve a twofold aim: first they are analytical in that they engage in philosophizing; and second they are practical in that they are modes of comportment. Ideas serve as constitutive categories both for thinking and for sociality.

Life is survival: Philosophy, writing, culture and art as practices of living

In his last interview *Learning How to Live Finally*, Derrida returns to another moment he tackled in *Athens*, that of considering the sentence 'we owe ourselves to death'. Here Derrida restates his argument from *Athens*, only now making his implicit remarks explicit to the reader. In two passages cited here, he writes:

> Learning to live should mean learning to die, learning to take into account, so as to accept, absolute mortality (that is, without salvation, resurrection or redemption – neither for oneself or the other). That's been the old philosophical injunction since Plato: to philosophize is to learn to die. I believe in this truth without being able to resign myself to it. And less and less so. I have never learned to accept it, to accept death, that is. (Derrida, 2007: 24)

> I remain uneducable when it comes to any kind of wisdom about knowing-how-to-die or, if you prefer, knowing-how-to-live. I still have not learned or picked up anything on the subject. (Derrida, 2007: 25)

Thinking of life in terms of learning to die, to accept death and mortality as the final point of one's existence, is a way of embracing one's own finitude as the foundation of existence and the urgency that this inescapable temporality imposes on one's mode of living.

Philosophy as a practice of living, like the duration of a photograph that does not decompose, is survival. Survival, here, is not duration or a period that one endures, rather it is for Derrida a theme:

> . . . the meaning of which is *not to be added on* to living and dying. It is originary: life is living on, life is survival [*la vie est survivre*]. To survive in the usual sense of the term means to continue to live, but also to live *after* death. (Derrida, 2007: 24)

This theme of survival is not an idea that is a supplement to life and death. For Derrida survival is 'an originary idea that constitutes the very structure of what we call existence, Dasein, if you will' (Derrida, 2007: 51). Survival is that which constitutes existence; survival is both a mode of living, comportment, and of living on after death. To live after death echoes 'to live infinite eternally', in that both call for a life that lives on in defiance of time or cuts against the grain of temporality, and one that will live on in collective memory after one is gone. While Derrida's qualifying to live 'eternally', as if one could live outside of time, appears contradictory to his overall approach to temporality, it is not. Here, Derrida is making a deliberate prescription. To live infinitely eternally is to be devoted – eternally – continuing without interruption as a mode of comportment – to living now and to living a life that leaves a trace behind, a trace that marks the presence of one's life having been lived meaningfully.

This theme of learning to live, of survival in its twofold sense, is for Derrida akin to photography/art/archive in that its aim is always to capture more than it can contain. Derrida expresses this striving thus:

> Because, you know, learning to live is always narcissistic (an idea, let me just note in passing, that I've tried to complicate elsewhere): one wants to live as much as possible, to save oneself, to persevere, and to cultivate all these things which, though infinitely greater and more powerful than oneself, nonetheless form a part of this little 'me' that they exceed on all sides. To ask me to renounce what formed me, what I've loved so much, what has been my law, is to ask me to die. (Derrida, 2007: 29–30)

Survival, as a mode of comportment, as a mode of living in the world, is for Derrida an ethos, an ethos that is 'intransigent or indeed incorruptible' (Derrida, 2007: 27). Derrida considers this ethos of living narcissistic in that it encompasses all of one's experiences which one wants to save and preserve. The self, here depicted as an archive of its own experiences, wants to contain more than is possible; this is a narcissism of having and saving all that constitutes oneself, of preserving all that cultivates and defines who one

is. To renounce one's socialization, one's experiences, one's past, is to renounce one's ethos and one's will to live. For Derrida, one's ethos is an attitude or comportment that he refuses to abandon or compromise, because to abandon it would be to divide the self from itself, to give away the archive of one's formative experiences, and thereby to lose one's memory, meaningful experiences, identity, and indeed all that makes one's life.

In refusing to abandon the ethos that defines his life, Derrida is offering an affirmation of life. This affirmation is an intensity, an intensity of experience that defines the life one lives:

> This surviving is life beyond life, life more than life, and my discourse is not a discourse of death, but, on the contrary, the affirmation of a living being who prefers not simply that which remains but the most intense life possible. (Derrida, 2007: 52)

> I live my death in writing. It's the ultimate test: one expropriates oneself without knowing exactly who is being entrusted with what is left behind. Who is going to inherit, and how? Will there be any heirs? (Derrida, 2007: 24)

In his discussion of living one's death in writing, Derrida means that it is the writing that lives on after one's death; the written words continue to express our thoughts when we can no longer do so. To live 'life more than life' for Derrida is to leave behind his possessions, his property, his thoughts, his works. In this expropriation, this transfer of meaning, Derrida reveals a small biographical detail, which he analytically separates from the work. Derrida's discourse, 'my discourse', the discourse of the man who tried to live a life that was as rich as possible, and in turn to express that living through his work, may be the one constant we can take from Derrida. The author who now realizes that who he is will be not only the work, but the life he left behind, wonders how that work will be interpreted, how that life will be remembered.

The role of work is closely related to the importance of the aesthetic dimension in overcoming death. The *techne* of learning to live, the relation that mediates between life and death, is the reflecting on, but more importantly a *living* in, one's present. That practice is always a temporal one, in which time is always unfolding and escaping our grasp to hold it still, like the arresting of time in the photograph. But the practice of photography brings us back to thinking art and archive; to live for Derrida is to practise life like art, to enjoy the intensity of experience, and like archive in that we must store those moments and hold them in our memory, in our ethos for life. Photography as art/archive draws out the aesthetic component of our existence, in terms of both the *what* and *how* our meanings, memories, understandings are stored, depicted, represented and organized. If we think of art/archive as the collection of our experiences and relations, of what constitutes us, we want to preserve them all. While this is an impossibility, it is one that we strive to attain in our aesthetic comportment (*techne*) of remembrance and reverence (mourning).

Mourning and friendship: Derrida and the sociability of death

It may come as a surprise that Derrida connects his discussion of the trace to the nature of mourning and thereby ultimately to comportment, friendship and an ethos of human connectivity. He introduces the concept of 'originary mourning': 'originary mourning',

that is, a mourning that does not wait for the so-called 'actual' death (Derrida, 2007: 29). Derrida's ideas, as he himself declares, are always ideas that serve a twofold aim: first they are analytical in that they engage in philosophizing, and second they are practical in that they are modes of comportment. In particular, the idea of 'originary mourning' is one that Derrida singles out for use as a practice of survival. Surviving and originary mourning intersect as they both are constitutive categories of thinking and sociality. For Derrida surviving and originary mourning go hand in hand; 'originary mourning' is not a mourning that would follow upon the death of another, the death of a friend or colleague, but a mourning that would be constitutive of friendship itself. Michael Naas argues that Derrida

> . . . had written more recently how friendship is structured from the very beginning by the possibility at least that one of two friends will see the other die, and so surviving, will be left to bury, to commemorate and to mourn, that is Derrida had formalized those laws of death and of mourning in numerous texts over the last few deceased, he also had to undergo or bear witness to these laws as friends – and there were many of them – went before him, making explicit or effective the structural laws that will have determined all his relationships and friendships from the very beginning. (Naas, 2004: 169)

As seen in Naas's interpretation, Derrida argues that friendship is constituted by the thought that one of the two will die before the other, and so the survivor (surviving) mourns as a way to bear witness to the meaning of that relationship. Naas's interpretation allows us to ask the question: What does mourning, and survival of the past in our remembrance of the dead, do for us as the living? Or more specifically: What do our relations of mourning teach us about our relations of living?

Simmel and the role of culture

If Derrida's interest in the social is focused on friendship and an ethos of cherishing the living, the sociological side of Simmel's reflections is quite different and focused on the work of culture, in terms of the everydayness of objects to ordinary people and specifically the meaning of ruins and their representations. This concern for the significance of the everydayness of cultural objects follows Murray Davis's interpretation of Simmel's sociological project as a 'method of suddenly grasping for the social universals in the most trivial particulars of man's existence, [whereby] the sociologist hopes to coherently comprehend for men their otherwise overwhelming social reality' (Davis, 1973: 328).

For Simmel, the creation of culture and the work of the mind are essential in overcoming the decay of the past, that is, of death itself. The mind reconstitutes the fragments of the past, now inextricably intertwined with nature as it reclaims the ruins, and turns this jumble of material into a new and beautiful unity. In 'The Ruin' Simmel emphasizes the sense of loss, but in 'Rome' he focuses on creation and the power of the imagination to overcome loss. Like Derrida, he celebrates human activity in the face of death and calls on us not to be passive in confronting the inevitable. The human mind/spirit reclaims and transfigures the remnants of the past in order to galvanize our living in the present.

The shared positions of Derrida and Simmel include an interest in the role of art as a practice of survival and a central human activity, the effort to reclaim the past for the present, and, above all, the refusal to be passive in the face of death. They differ, however, in that Derrida's turn to the social is linked to mourning and friendship, whereas Simmel's cultural turn is more bounded within the creativity of the individual mind; and Simmel's perspective is strongly connected to the past (even as it is transfigured in the present), whereas Derrida, while cognizant of the past, looks more boldly at the present.

By seeing the points of intellectual rapprochement between Derrida and Simmel within the wider context of theorizing life and death, we can see how the relationship between philosophy and sociology is much more reciprocal and mutually informing than it is two distinct modes of thought. By looking at the similarities and differences between the two thinkers through this engagement we see how each informs the other in unexpected ways. In the end, Derrida the philosopher draws us to the importance of considering the significance of everyday objects and the importance of the social relations we have with other human beings, whereas Simmel the sociologist draws our attention to the transcending life-affirming nature of the human spirit which synthesizes the world into a coherent whole. As a result, philosophy and sociology can be seen in a complementary way, each pushing the other into further questioning and rethinking of previously held assumptions. While differing in their strategies of inquiry, each approach informs the other as ways of thinking about the questions of life, death and the need to find meaning in our lives. Philosophical reflections lead us into sociological concerns which in turn incite further reflections. Through this rapprochement we can see how the disciplinary divide – between the theoretical and the practical, the abstract and the concrete, and the finite and the transcendental – is ultimately a continuum along which we travel in both directions as we contemplate the possibilities of learning how to die and learning how to live.

Through our reading of Simmel in conversation with Derrida, we can fully trace how Derrida is able to make use both of narratives of origin (concerning the past) and of narratives of play without origin. He remarks that 'together [they] share the field which we call, in such problematic fashion, the social sciences' and he urges us not to choose between them, but to 'try to conceive of the common ground, and the *différance* of this irreducible difference' (Derrida, 1978: 293). Photography as finitude/survival draws out the temporal nature of all existence; the past is not a weight that saddens or paralyses us, but rather a legacy that animates as it survives and informs our present (mourning) and our comportment as we are thrown into our future. To consider the practice of living, of which Derrida somewhat disingenuously claims to offer no advice, is to inherit Derrida as a model of one who practised the lessons of photography (art/archive, finitude/survival) in his very approach to being-in-the-world. To become an heir of Derrida is to learn to live the photography of our lives to the fullest in the moment, as if it were infinite and eternal. Our practice of living, our photography, is not one that looks to capture anything beyond our own bounded temporality. The practice of living is not a detached contemplation of what has been, is, or will occur, rather it is an engaged comportment in the present which refuses to consider the photograph of tomorrow, the photograph Derrida never saw.

Notes

1. Since this is a selective reading of Derrida's work, this article does not seek to cover the entirety of his works, nor does it try to forge linkages across the entirety of his *oeuvre*. For a review of *Athens, Still Remains* and Derrida's work on photography in general, see Naas (2011).
2. Kemple and Teucher argue that due to the hybrid nature of Simmel's writing, they 'translate "*Geist*" sometimes in its traditional sense as "spirit" and sometimes in its more modern meaning as "mind"'. See Kemple and Teucher (2007: 30).
3. For a particularly lucid commentary on the role of spirit and its form-giving power, see Davis (1973). For an interpretation of this form-giving power, especially in terms of sculpture and building, see ibid. and Lippman (1959).
4. This reading of Simmel's transcendental spirit resonates with Davis's assessment that Simmel was 'more concerned with the continual process of transcending than with the particular spiritual forms transcended into. Thus, all of Simmel's discussions elevate humanity in general, and the reader in particular, toward spiritual realms where their contradictions are overcome or universalized' (Davis, 1997: 384).
5. For a reading of Simmel that emphasizes his pessimism as a result of the widening gap between culture and man see Frisby (1991). This pessimism of the weakness of man in the face of his creations resonates with the Frankfurt School and the notion of technological rationality coming to colonize the life-world.
6. This feeling is now said to infuse many representations of ruins, including even those of Berlin *anno* 1945 and Detroit. See Von Moltke in Hell and Schönle (2010).
7. For further discussions of Derrida and photography in relationship to materiality and technology, see Peim (2005) and Strathausen (2009).
8. Baring (2011: 299–300) points out the problematic of when to use *nous* [we] and when to use *on* (the impersonal construction) as a topic in formative discussions; and here Derrida's use of *nous* affirms a feeling of connectedness.
9. The central importance of deferral in Derrida's work cannot be underestimated; and it is striking that he associates this word [*demeure*] with both *différance* and Freud's *Aufschub*, as in the delay of pleasure (Baring, 2011: 202).

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